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NATO: Response to the Crisis in Ukraine and Security Concerns in Central and Eastern Europe

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Summary

Russia's recent military incursions into Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea have caused observers and policy makers on both sides of the Atlantic, including Members of Congress, to reassess the security situation in Europe and the role of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in upholding European security. The security concerns of NATO's Central and Eastern European member states and non-NATO member states such as Moldova and Ukraine are of particular concern.

NATO's member states have strongly condemned Russian actions in Ukraine and have taken steps aimed both at reassuring allies and partners in Central and Eastern Europe and at deterring further Russian aggression. These include demonstrations of support for Ukraine and its territorial integrity; actions to demonstrate the alliance's commitment to the defense of its Central and Eastern European member states; and measures aimed at rebuking Russia. NATO member states have said they will continue to conduct previously planned military exercises in Ukraine and elsewhere in the region.

The United States has been a key driver behind the NATO response and has taken additional military measures intended to reassure its allies and partners in Central and Eastern Europe. These include the deployment of U.S. fighter jets to Poland and the Baltic states, U.S. naval vessels to the Black Sea, and Marines to Romania. The United States has supplied the Ukrainian government with some nonlethal military assistance, but has thus far ruled out providing lethal military aid.

Although these actions have been welcomed by supporters of the United States and NATO, some analysts and allied governments have called for a more concerted military response. Among other things, critics have called for more robust forward or permanent deployment of U.S. and NATO forces in Central and Eastern Europe; additional military exercises in the region; and additional military assistance to the Ukrainian government, including military training and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons and other arms.

The U.S. Congress has played an active role in guiding the U.S. response to the crisis in Ukraine, including by authorizing \$150 million in financial assistance and a \$1 billion loan guarantee to the Ukrainian government and supporting sanctions against Russia (P.L. 113-95). However, some Members of Congress have called on the Obama Administration and NATO to take additional military action to reassure allies in Central and Eastern Europe and deter Russia. In addition, some Members have called for a more resolute demonstration of NATO's commitment to enlargement, including to Georgia, a former republic of the Soviet Union, with which Russia had a brief military conflict in 2008. For example, the proposed Forging Peace through Strength in Ukraine and the Transatlantic Alliance Act (H.R. 4433), introduced on April 9, 2014, calls for additional NATO and U.S. military assistance to Ukraine and calls for immediate NATO membership for Montenegro and the granting of a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia.

This report addresses the NATO and U.S. military response to the crisis in Ukraine. It does not discuss political, economic, or energy policy responses. For information on these and other aspects of the crisis response, see CRS Report RL33460, *Ukraine: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, by Steven Woehrel.

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Overview

The U.S. Congress has expressed deep concern over Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. Among other things, the crisis in Ukraine has heightened concerns in the United States and in Europe about the future direction and scope of the transatlantic security relationship and the cornerstone of that relationship, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Some policy makers and commentators have called for a reassessment of the transatlantic community's progress in realizing its goal of a Europe "whole, free, and at peace," citing security concerns in some of NATO's Central and Eastern European member states and ongoing territorial disputes in countries on the alliance's borders, such as Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Questions about NATO's commitment and capacity to defend its member states and about the nature of the alliance's relationship with Russia have moved to the forefront of discussions about NATO's future. These questions are expected to feature prominently at NATO's next summit of heads of state and government, scheduled to take place in Wales on September 4-5, 2014.

The crisis in Ukraine has also exposed longer-standing tensions within NATO regarding its strategic focus. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has evolved from an exclusive focus on territorial defense and deterrence in Europe to overseeing a range of military and crisis management operations across the globe. This transformation was predicated largely on the perception that Russia no longer posed a security threat to NATO, and on a conviction that the primary security challenges facing the allies emanated from beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. However, some NATO members, including many former members of the communist bloc, have consistently expressed concern that the alliance's transformation could come at the expense of its capacity to uphold its commitment to collective defense, enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. After more than a decade of war in Afghanistan and against the backdrop of a militarily resurgent Russia, some allies are calling for a renewed NATO focus on collective defense.

Debates about NATO's mission come against the backdrop of continued economic stagnation in Europe and long-standing U.S. concerns about a downward trend in European defense spending, shortfalls in European defense capabilities, and burden sharing within the alliance. In 2013, total defense spending by NATO European allies as a percentage of GDP was about 1.6%; and just three NATO allies (Greece, the UK, and the United States) exceeded the alliance's goal of spending 2% of GDP on defense. Since 2001, the U.S. share of total allied defense spending has grown from 63% to 72%.¹ Analysts in the United States have long asserted that defense spending in many European countries is inefficient, with disproportionately high personnel costs coming at the expense of much-needed research, development, and procurement. In 2013, only four allies met a NATO guideline to devote 20% of defense expenditures to the purchase of major equipment, considered a key indicator of the pace of military modernization.² These trends correlate with significant shortfalls in key military capabilities, including strategic air- and sealift; aerial refueling; and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR).

¹ NATO, *Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence*, February 24, 2014.

² The four allies are the United States, France, Turkey, and the UK. See NATO, *Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence*, February 24, 2014.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and others have argued that the economic constraints facing allied governments could spur much-needed defense cooperation among European allies. At NATO's May 2012 summit, the allies committed to a "Smart Defense" initiative that calls for cooperation, prioritization, and specialization in pursuit of needed defense capabilities.³ Some critics maintain that this is just the latest in a long line of post-Cold War efforts to enhance capabilities that have had mixed success, at best. They argue that the limited outcomes may reflect a general lack of public support for military engagement and divergent threat perceptions both across the Atlantic and within Europe. As noted above, within Europe, some allies have emphasized the need for territorial defense capabilities, while others have stressed the importance of more flexible, rapidly deployable units and civilian-military crisis management operations. An increasingly strained budget environment and heightened concerns about the security threat from Russia appear to be amplifying these differences.

U.S. officials have consistently underscored their firm commitment to the transatlantic security relationship and the collective defense of the alliance. However, far-reaching defense budget cuts in the United States, the Obama Administration's "rebalance" to Asia, and the withdrawal over the past two years of two of the U.S. Army's four Brigade Combat Teams based in Europe have raised questions about future U.S. commitments to European security. Russia's actions in Ukraine have heightened these concerns.

NATO and U.S. Military Response to Russia's Annexation of Crimea

Reflecting the views of the United States and its European allies, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen has characterized Russia's recent military aggression as "the most serious crisis in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall," and declared that NATO can "no longer do business as usual with Russia."⁴ NATO's response to the situation thus far has included demonstrations of support for Ukraine and its territorial integrity; actions to demonstrate the alliance's commitment to the defense of its Central and Eastern European member states; and measures aimed at rebuking Russia. Specifically:

- The allies have agreed to strengthen political and military cooperation with the government in Kyiv. This includes providing military trainers to assist in Ukraine's military modernization efforts and efforts to help improve the interoperability of Ukrainian and allied armed forces through exercises and joint operations.⁵ On April 1, the Ukraine's Foreign Minister said Ukraine has not requested and does not expect material military assistance from NATO, beyond training.⁶ However, this may not preclude bilateral assistance from individual

³ NATO officials have announced 24 new multinational defense projects in which assets are pooled or shared, including acquisition, training, force protection, and ISR initiatives. For more information, see NATO's Smart Defense webpage: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/78125.htm>.

⁴ NATO, "A Strong NATO in a Changed World," Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Brussels Forum," March 21, 2014.

⁵ Small Ukrainian deployments contribute to NATO operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and off the Horn of Africa.

⁶ NATO, Press Conference by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, April 1, 2014. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/events_108401.htm?selectedLocale=en.

NATO members, such as a reported request in March for U.S. military aid (see “Ukraine,” below).

- NATO member states have deployed additional fighter jets to the alliance’s Baltic Air Policing mission and NATO has begun to carry out aerial surveillance flights over Poland and Romania. The United States is currently leading the Baltic Air Policing mission, with Poland due to take command on May 1, 2014. The mission has been led by NATO allies on a rotational basis since 2004, with detachments of four fighter aircraft for four-month rotations operating from an air base in Lithuania. In March, the United States deployed an additional six F-15 Eagle aircraft to the Air Policing mission. The UK, Denmark, and France are among the other allies that have committed to deploying additional aircraft to the mission in the near future. Since mid-March 2014, NATO airborne warning and control system (AWACS) surveillance aircraft have been conducting twice daily flights to monitor events in Ukraine, one over Poland and one over Romania.
- In early April, NATO announced the suspension of all “practical” civilian and military cooperation with Russia in the framework of the NATO-Russia Council. Political dialogue between the two sides will continue. Cooperative activities in the NATO-Russia Council that could be affected include a helicopter maintenance fund and a counternarcotics initiative in Afghanistan, and some joint counter-terrorism initiatives.

On April 16, 2014, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen announced that the allies would take further military measures “to reinforce our collective defense and demonstrate the strength of allied solidarity.” He indicated that these measures could include expansion of the Baltic Air Policing Mission, with a possible increase from 4 to 12 fighter jets; deployment of naval vessels to the Baltic Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and elsewhere; deployment of ground forces to Eastern Europe; development of updated military defense plans for Central and Eastern European allies; and additional NATO military training and exercises in the region.⁷ Most allies in Central and Eastern Europe have requested NATO take such measures to demonstrate more clearly the alliance’s willingness and capacity to defend its member states (see “Security Situation and Concerns in Central and Eastern Europe”). However, other allies have cautioned against a “militarization” of NATO relations with Russia. Officials in Germany, for example, have said that permanent troop deployments in member states formerly aligned with the Soviet Union could represent an unnecessary and counter-productive provocation of Russia.⁸

NATO member states say they are moving forward with previously planned military exercises in Ukraine and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. In Ukraine, such exercises are not conducted under the aegis of NATO, but rather as multinational exercises that may include NATO allies. Military exercises scheduled to take place in Ukraine in 2014 reportedly include one U.S.-led ground forces exercise, one U.S.-led naval exercise, a Polish-Ukrainian air force exercise and a Polish-Ukrainian military police exercise, and three additional multinational ground exercises.⁹ The U.S. Army-led Rapid Trident 2014 is scheduled to take place in western Ukraine in July and

⁷ NATO, *Doorstop Statement by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen Following the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council*, April 16, 2014. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_109231.htm.

⁸ See, for example, “Ukraine Crisis Exposes Gaps between Berlin and NATO,” *Spiegelonline*, April 7, 2014.

⁹ Vladimir Socor, “Ukraine Seeks Closer Ties with NATO and its Member Countries,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, April 7, 2014.

will reportedly feature a combined U.S.-Ukrainian battalion headquarters practicing a peacekeeping operation.¹⁰ Last year's Rapid Trident exercise in Ukraine included 1,300 troops from 17 nations. The U.S.-led annual naval exercise Sea Breeze has reportedly been the largest annual maritime exercise in the Black Sea. The 2013 exercise, held in Odessa, involved naval, air, and land forces from 14 countries, including NATO allies and partners.¹¹

As well as being a key proponent of the NATO response thus far, the Obama Administration has taken some additional military steps intended to reassure Central and Eastern European allies. These include the aforementioned contribution to the Baltic Air Policing mission and the deployment in March of an aviation detachment of 12 F-16s and 300 personnel to Lask Air Base in Poland. In early April, the Defense Department also announced that it would deploy an additional 175 marines to Romania to supplement the Black Sea rotational force, which will now consist of about 400 marines.¹² In addition, the Defense Department has deployed two naval vessels, the USS *Truxton* and the USS *Donald Cook*, to the Black Sea for exercises to "reassure American allies of the U.S. commitment to the region."¹³ The United States has also suspended all military-to-military activities with Russia, including two previously scheduled trilateral exercises with Canada and Norway.

¹⁰ Nancy Montgomery, "U.S. Army to Proceed with Planned Exercises in Ukraine," *Stars and Stripes*, March 13, 2014.

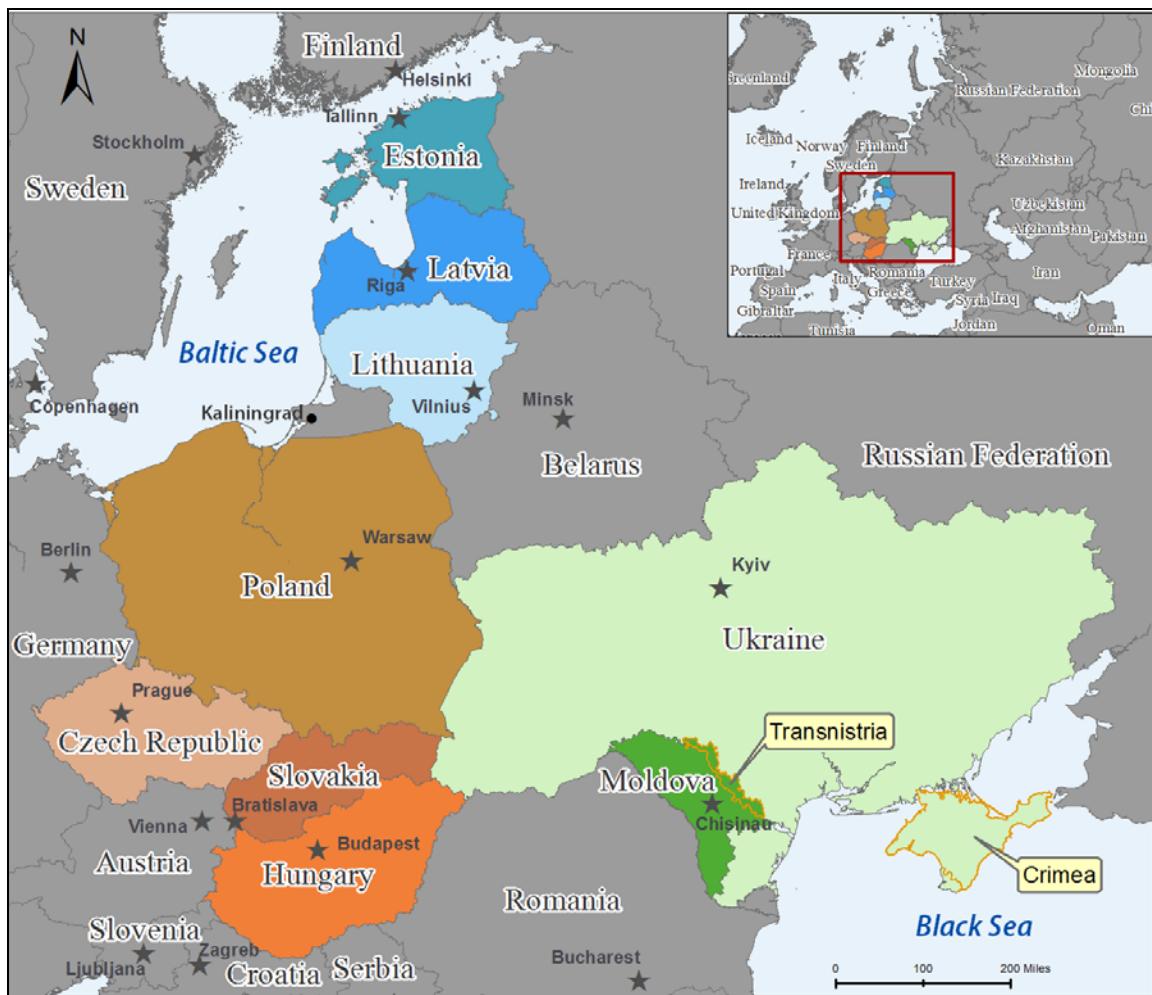
¹¹ "Exercise Sea Breeze 2013 Draws to a Close," U.S. Navy, July, 21, 2013, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=75504.

¹² The additional 175 Marines are technically being deployed to a rotational crisis response force of 500 based at Moron Air base in Spain.

¹³ The USS *Truxton* was deployed to the Black Sea in early March for what the Department of Defense characterized as a previously planned training event. The deployment has since been extended. Nick Simeone, "U.S. Sends More Marines to Romania, Navy Vessel to Black Sea," *American Forces Press Service*, April 2, 2014.

Security Situation and Concerns in Central and Eastern Europe

Figure 1. Selected Countries in Central and Eastern Europe



Poland and the Visegrád Four

Following the annexation of Crimea, concerns have sharpened in Eastern Europe about Russia's possible future intentions. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, and Slovakia followed in 2004. In addition to their membership in NATO and the EU, these four countries cooperate on a range of regional issues and interests as the Visegrád Group (V4).¹⁴ All four countries are generally considered by U.S. officials to be strong NATO allies, and all four have participated in the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. In recent years, there have been some concerns in the United States and EU about an apparent backsliding on democracy in Hungary,

¹⁴ The governments of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia founded the Visegrád Group as a platform for regional cooperation in 1991 in the city of Visegrád, Hungary.

with the recently reelected government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán demonstrating authoritarian tendencies and moving toward closer relations with Russia.

Geographical proximity and long-standing historical relationships, including the experience of Soviet domination during the Communist era, color attitudes toward Russia in the V4 countries. Energy dependence is also an important consideration in relations with Russia: about 59% of the natural gas consumed in Poland, 80% in Hungary, 84% in Slovakia, and 57% in the Czech Republic comes from Russia.¹⁵ In recent years, Russia has been actively trying to extend its influence in the region through energy deals and the acquisition of energy infrastructure. While business usually centers on natural gas, Hungary also agreed to a deal with Russia's state nuclear company in early 2014 for the upgrade of a Hungarian nuclear power plant, financed by a €10 billion (about \$13.7 billion) loan from Moscow.

In late February 2014, the V4 foreign ministers released a statement reiterating "their strong interest in maintaining the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine...."¹⁶ While the government of Poland has subsequently been at the forefront of arguments calling for a robust response to Russia's actions, the governments of the other three Visegrád countries, especially Hungary, have been more reserved. Despite possible reservations in those three countries about additional economic sanctions, all V4 members agreed to the limited sanctions imposed thus far by the EU in response to the annexation. The EU's common position is that the Crimea referendum was illegal, and no EU member states recognize its outcome.¹⁷

Poland stands out among the V4 group as having the most difficult relationship with Russia. Despite a mild thaw in the relationship after the Polish president and nearly 100 high-level Polish officials were killed in a 2010 airplane crash in Russia, Polish suspicions about the nature of Putin's Russia have long persisted. Poland is by far the most populous country, the largest economy, and the most significant military actor of the V4.¹⁸ Like many European countries, Poland is in the midst of a long-term transformation to a smaller, more capable, and more deployable military. Despite budgetary pressures, Poland is pursuing a broad equipment acquisition program linked to the need to phase out remaining Soviet-era material. In an effort to upgrade its main battle tanks and other armored vehicles, helicopters, air defenses, drones, and individual soldier equipment, Poland has reportedly significantly increased equipment expenditures.¹⁹

Poland has been a leading allied participant in NATO's "out of area" Afghanistan mission. At the same time, given its enduring perception of Russia as a threat, Poland has also been a leading voice in calls for NATO to focus on its traditional vocation as an alliance of territorial defense. In the wake of the Crimea annexation, Polish officials have revived a long-standing wish to base U.S. forces on their territory, calling for two NATO brigades (approximately 10,000 soldiers) to

¹⁵ Eurogas, *Statistical Report 2013*, http://www.eurogas.org/uploads/media/Eurogas_Statistical_Report_2013.pdf.

¹⁶ *Joint Statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on Ukraine*, February 24, 2014, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/joint-statement-of-v4>.

¹⁷ See http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/141601.pdf.

¹⁸ According to the CIA World Factbook, the population of Poland is approximately 38.3 million, the Czech Republic 10.6 million, Hungary 9.9 million, and Slovakia 5.4 million.

¹⁹ Wojciech Lorenz, *EU Battle Group: A Chance for a Breakthrough in Visegrad 4 Cooperation*, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, April 16, 2013.

be stationed in Poland as a security guarantee.²⁰ The 12 U.S. F-16s and 300 airmen deployed to Poland in March 2014 build on a small U.S. aviation detachment that was established in Poland in 2012, which has supported quarterly training rotations of 200 U.S. personnel operating F-16s and C-130s. Poland also participates in the U.S./NATO European Phased Adaptive Approach missile defense system, intended to guard against a possible Iranian missile threat. Aegis-ashore interceptors are scheduled to be deployed in Poland in 2018.

The area posing the most direct threat to Poland is Kaliningrad, a 5,800 square mile Russian enclave wedged between Poland and Lithuania. Kaliningrad has a heavy Russian military presence, including the Baltic Sea Fleet and two airbases. In addition, Russia has reportedly stationed, or at least threatened to station, Iskander short-range nuclear missiles there.²¹

Compared to Poland, the militaries of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia are significantly smaller and possess more modest capabilities. Each of the three countries also faces substantial resource constraints and budget pressures: since 2008, the Czech Republic has cut its defense spending by 16%, Slovakia by 22%, and Hungary by 29%.²² Nevertheless, the Czech and Hungarian forces are considered by military experts to be well-structured, well-equipped, well-trained, highly capable for their size, and experienced from participation in international deployments. Analysts observe that a low defense budget presents the Slovak military with an especially difficult challenge because it faces a need to replace a large percentage of its ageing equipment.

In recent years, the V4 countries have sought to expand their cooperation from largely political matters to include security and defense. The four generally consult closely with one another in attempting to present a unified regional stance within NATO and on issues related to the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). In 2013, the V4 countries launched plans to form an EU Battlegroup, a rapid reaction force consisting of 2,500 to 3,000 troops, to be operational by 2016. The V4 countries have also sought to increase military and industrial cooperation in line with NATO's Smart Defense and the EU's Pooling and Sharing initiative. Current or prospective areas of such cooperation include joint procurement of ammunition, armored vehicles, individual soldier equipment, and battlefield imaging systems, as well as joint logistics programs, and joint development of capabilities such as countering improvised explosive devices (IED); chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense (CBRN); joint training of helicopter pilots and air traffic controllers; and cyber defense.²³

²⁰ Neil Buckley, James Fontanella-Khan, and Jan Cienski, "Poland Calls for NATO Troop Deployment," *Financial Times*, March 1, 2014.

²¹ Steve Guterman, "Russia has Stationed Iskander Missiles in Western Region: Reports," *Reuters*, December 16, 2013.

²² Wojciech Lorenz, *EU Battle Group: A Chance for a Breakthrough in Visegrad 4 Cooperation*, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, April 16, 2013.

²³ Robert Kupiecki, *Visegrad Defense Cooperation: From Mutual Support to Strengthening NATO and the EU*, Center for European Policy Analysis, April 2, 2013.

Table 1. Visegrád Group Defense Information

| | Army Size | Tanks | Artillery | Combat Aircraft | Attack Helicopters | 2013 Defense Budget | Defense Spending % of GDP |
|----------------|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Czech Republic | 13,000 | 30 | 146 | 47 | 24 | \$2.18 billion | 1.1 |
| Hungary | 10,300 | 30 | 68 | 14 | 11 | \$1.1 billion | 0.8 |
| Poland | 48,200 | 893 | 783 | 106 | 28 | \$9.83 billion | 1.9 |
| Slovakia | 6,250 | 30 | 68 | 20 | 15 | \$995 million | 1.0 |

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2014*.

The Baltic States

The three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, were formerly republics of the Soviet Union, having been absorbed into the USSR in 1940 after achieving independence between the two world wars. They became independent again with the breakup of the USSR in 1991 and joined both NATO and the European Union in 2004.

In general terms, the view of the Baltic countries is comparable to that of Poland in perceiving Russia as an enduring threat. Size, geographic location, and energy dependence make the Baltic countries vulnerable to Russia, and events in Ukraine have significantly increased anxiety in the Baltics. All three Baltic countries also have minority populations of ethnic Russians, a significant element in the threat calculation given that claims of persecution against Russian communities have been a part of the pretext for Russia's interventions in both Georgia and Ukraine. Language issues have caused tensions between Russia and Latvia. In 2012, a referendum rejected naming Russian as Latvia's official second language, although it is the first language for about one-third of the population. In Estonia, plans to relocate a Soviet war memorial led to clashes between police and pro-Russian demonstrators in 2007. About one-quarter of Estonia's population is ethnically Russian. Estonia subsequently found itself the target of a large-scale coordinated cyberattack thought to have originated from either pro-Russian groups or from within the Russian government itself. Lithuania found itself singled out by Russia for trade sanctions in late 2013 as an expression of Russia's displeasure over energy issues and the EU's Eastern Partnership. Ethnic Russians comprise a smaller percentage of Lithuania's population, about 7%.

The Baltic countries joined their NATO and EU partners in strongly condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea as illegal. All three initially called for the EU to impose harsh political and economic sanctions, but Latvia and Lithuania have since moderated their stance on sanctions considerably. Latvian and Lithuanian government enthusiasm for sanctions has been tempered by the potential economic consequences of such measures. Economists have suggested that severe EU sanctions against Russia, the Baltics' largest non-EU trade partner, could push both countries into a deep recession.²⁴

The break-up of the USSR left the Baltic countries with virtually no national militaries, and their forces remain small and limited. The defense planning of the Baltic countries consequently relies heavily on NATO membership, and they have emphasized active participation in the alliance,

²⁴ "Crimea crisis causes unease in the Baltics," *Economist Intelligence Unit*, April 1, 2014.

including by having contributed troops to the Afghanistan mission. Analysts suggest that recent events in Ukraine are pushing the Baltic countries to recommit even more deeply to NATO. Beyond NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission (see below), some Baltic officials have urged NATO to establish a permanent base in the region. Rotating forces, increased exercises, and pre-positioning of assets may be a more likely NATO response to bolster security in the region.²⁵

Lacking their own fighter aircraft, the Baltic countries rely on their NATO allies to police and defend their airspace. NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission was launched in 2004 and is based at an airbase in Lithuania. About a dozen NATO members have taken part in the mission, including the United States, UK, France, Germany, Poland, Denmark, and the Czech Republic, providing four fighters at a time on rotating four-month deployment. In 2011, the Baltic countries pledged to gradually increase their combined contribution to the mission from €2.2 million (approximately \$3 million) in 2011 to €3.5 million (approximately \$4.8 million) in 2015 to pay for the costs of accommodating the air policing contingents, providing ground services for their aircraft, and contributing to the cost of aviation fuel.

Compared to most other members of NATO, Estonia spends a relatively high percentage of GDP on defense. The country is seeking to add a second infantry brigade by 2022, upgrade its air defense system, and modernize a range of ground warfare equipment. Estonia also hosts NATO's cyber defense center. Latvia's forces are smaller and less well equipped, and the country's defense spending has suffered from severe budgetary pressures. Latvia aims to double its defense spending as a percentage of GDP by 2020 and to procure new equipment including armored vehicles, transport helicopters, and air defense radar. Lithuania's forces are likewise pursuing restructuring and re-equipment programs, but efforts have been similarly hindered by funding constraints. All three Baltic countries also contribute forces to the EU's Nordic Battlegroup, a rapid reaction unit of 2,400 troops expected to be ready and available for deployment in 2015 (additionally comprised of troops from Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Ireland).²⁶

Table 2. Baltic States Defense Information

| | Army Size | Tanks | Artillery | Combat Aircraft | Attack Helicopters | 2013 Defense Budget | Defense Spending % of GDP |
|-----------|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Estonia | 5,300 | -- | 334 | -- | -- | \$480 million | 2.0 |
| Latvia | 1,250 | 3 | 76 | -- | -- | \$300 million | 1.0 |
| Lithuania | 7,350 | -- | 48 | -- | -- | \$355 million | 0.8 |

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2014*.

Moldova

Moldova's pro-Western government has responded to recent events in Ukraine with great concern. Moldova and Ukraine have stopped armed men trying to cross the border from Transnistria to Ukraine to "participate" in demonstrations against Ukraine's government.

²⁵ Richard Milne, "Baltics Urge NATO to Base Permanent Force in Region," *Financial Times*, April 9, 2014.

²⁶ See <http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/about/our-mission-in-sweden-and-abroad/international-activities-and-operations/nordic-battle-group/>.

Transnistria, Moldova's breakaway region with a strongly pro-Russian government, has redoubled its long-standing efforts to secure Russia's recognition for its independence. Russia has not yet done so, but may have little more to lose in doing so now, given international condemnation of its annexation of Crimea. In March 2014, NATO's top military commander, General Breedlove, expressed concern that Russian forces could sweep across eastern and southern Ukraine to link up with Transnistria. Such a move, while very ambitious, would have the advantage of linking the region directly with Russia.

While Moscow has shown hostility toward the Moldovan government, especially its intention to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union in June 2014, it is unclear whether Russia would take military action against Moldova to prevent it from doing so. Most observers believe Russia will continue to try to turn Moldova away from a pro-Western orientation by using more indirect tactics such as imposing de facto trade sanctions, increasing support for Transnistria and separatism in Moldova's Gagauzia region, and supporting the Communist opposition to the government in the run-up to Moldova's parliamentary elections late this year. During a visit to Moldova on March 30, 2014, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland confirmed U.S. support for Moldova's path toward European integration and for anti-corruption efforts, strengthening border security, boosting Moldovan exports, and energy security, among other areas.

Moldova does not seek NATO membership, but it does participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Moldova currently receives very modest U.S. security assistance: an estimated \$1.25 million in Foreign Military Financing in FY 2014, as well as \$750,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds.

Table 3. Moldova Defense Information

| Army Size | Tanks | Artillery | Combat Aircraft | Attack Helicopters | 2013 Defense Budget | Defense Spending % of GDP |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Moldova | 3,250 | -- | 148 | -- | -- | \$24 million |

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2014*.

Ukraine

Perhaps the most urgent challenges facing Ukraine's government are Russia's annexation of Crimea and attempted destabilization of Eastern Ukraine. Over 20,000 Russian troops remain in Crimea, according to Ukraine's government, while the Ukrainian government is also struggling to establish control over eastern and southern Ukraine, where Russian-language speakers predominate. Thousands of pro-Russian protestors have demonstrated in the region, especially in the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region, and Kharkiv. On April 6, demonstrators in Donetsk and Luhansk stormed and occupied key government buildings. Possibly inspired by the Crimean scenario, the demonstrators in Donetsk declared a Donetsk People's Republic and called for Russia to send troops to protect them. Ukrainian police, perhaps suffering from low morale due to the events of the past three months, have generally tried to avoid conflict with both pro-and anti-government demonstrators.

On April 13, armed men seized government and other key buildings in additional cities and towns in the Donbas region. Ukrainian officials say they have arrested Russian intelligence operatives who they say are organizing these activities. On April 15, Ukrainian leaders said the country's

armed forces have begun operations to take back control of buildings controlled by the armed groups and clear roadblocks. Russia has warned that any crackdown could lead to civil war.

Some observers believe Russia could use widespread violence in eastern Ukraine as a pretext for military intervention. As noted earlier, NATO General Breedlove told journalists on April 2 that the approximately 40,000 Russian troops on Ukraine's borders were capable of attacking within 12 hours and of attaining their objectives within Ukraine within three to five days. In March 2014, Ukraine's acting President Turchynov said that Ukraine had only 6,000 combat ready troops. Ukraine is currently undergoing a partial mobilization to ready tens of thousands of additional troops, but the state of their training and equipment is uncertain.

Respected Russian military observer Pavel Felgenhauer has said that Putin's military window of opportunity for an invasion of eastern and southern Ukraine is from now to about mid-May. However, this window would soon start to close, as Russia's spring conscript call-up started on April 1. This will require last year's recruits to be gradually mustered out as green replacements arrive. Felgenhauer believes that combat readiness of Russian forces on Ukraine's borders will soon start to decline, and recover only around August or September 2014.²⁷ If Felgenhauer's analysis is correct, Russia could make even greater efforts to create chaos in eastern and southern Ukraine in order to disrupt Ukraine's May 25 presidential election, and possibly also to provide the pretext for an invasion. Other Russian military analysts point out that even if a Russian invasion was initially successful, many more troops would be needed to occupy large stretches of eastern and southern Ukraine.

In March 2013, Ukraine requested military aid from the United States, according to several press reports. A full list of what Ukraine is seeking has not been disclosed, but press reports claim that Ukraine has asked for arms and ammunition, communications gear, intelligence support, aviation fuel, night-vision goggles, mine-clearing equipment, vehicles, medical gear, and other items. According to these reports, the Administration has declined so far to send lethal military aid to Ukraine. In March 2014, the United States sent 300,000 Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) to Ukraine, at a cost of about \$3 million. More unspecified nonlethal aid is being considered for delivery, according to the U.S. European Command.

Those arguing for military aid for Ukraine say the United States needs to show resolve in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. They argue such aid could serve to deter Putin from invading eastern Ukraine. Some objections to military aid for Ukraine are that it could foreclose a diplomatic solution to the crisis; that it could actually provoke Putin to attack eastern Ukraine; and that it could end U.S.-Russian cooperation in such issues as the withdrawal of U.S. equipment from Afghanistan. There could also be concerns in the near term about the aid absorption capacity of Ukraine's armed forces, which are in a poor state at present.

²⁷ See Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russia's Window of Opportunity in Ukraine," *Foreign Policy*, March 25, 2014.

Table 4. Ukraine Defense Information

| Army Size | Tanks | Artillery | Combat Aircraft | Attack Helicopters | 2013 Defense Budget | Defense Spending % of GDP |
|-----------|--------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Ukraine | 64,750 | 1,150 | 2,170 | 231 | 139 | \$2.42 billion |

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2014*.

NATO-Russia Relations

Russian actions in Ukraine have prompted a reassessment of post-Cold War efforts to build a cooperative relationship with Moscow. As noted above, NATO suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia on April 2. In the words of NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow, “For 20 years, the security of the Euro-Atlantic region has been based on the premise that we do not face an adversary to our east. That premise is now in doubt.”²⁸ According to some analysts, Russia’s annexation of Crimea validates the concerns long expressed by some NATO member states, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, regarding Russia’s commitment to partnership, its unpredictability, acts of hostility toward NATO and its partners, and perceived attempts to sow disunity within the alliance. On the other hand, while Russian actions have succeeded in drawing uniform condemnation from across NATO and the European Union, many in Europe and the United States emphasize that Europe’s long-term security will depend on cooperative relations with Russia. As noted above, some NATO members in Western Europe have expressed concern that a military response to Russian actions could significantly hinder future attempts to boost cooperation with Russia.

The principal institutional mechanism for NATO-Russia cooperation has been the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), established in May 2002, five years after the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act provided the formal basis for bilateral cooperation. Most observers agree that despite having advanced NATO-Russia cooperation in some areas—including in Afghanistan—the NRC has failed to live up to its potential. These perceived shortcomings are often attributed to Russian suspicion about NATO’s long-term intentions, including with respect to countries it long considered within its sphere of influence such as Ukraine and Georgia.

NATO and European officials stress that they continue to aspire to cooperation and partnership with Russia. However, analysts expect ties to continue to be marked by contention and mistrust, at least for the time being. Moscow has objected to NATO and the United States’ military responses to the crisis, calling into question the alliance’s commitment to a 1997 pledge—codified in the NATO-Russia Founding Act—to refrain from permanently stationing substantial combat forces in countries that joined NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although NATO has not as yet made decisions about such deployments, Secretary General Rasmussen has responded to Russian complaints by noting that Russia “has violated every principle and international commitment it has made.”²⁹

²⁸ NATO, “A New Strategic Reality in Europe,” speech by Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow to the 21st International Conference on Euro-Atlantic Security, April 4, 2014.

²⁹ NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen as quoted by Kathrin Hille and Peter Spiegel, “NATO Chief Defends Eastern Advance,” *Financial Times*, April 4, 2014.

As yet, NATO and EU member states have not collectively committed to ending arms sales to Russia, despite criticism from analysts and governments on both sides of the Atlantic. Compared to other European arms sales, sales to Russia are relatively insignificant. However, over the past several years, some critics have drawn attention to several high profile deals. Chief among these is a 2011 French agreement to sell Russia two amphibious assault warships in a deal worth €1.1 billion (about \$1.5 billion)—the first ever sale of a significant offensive military capability by a NATO member to Russia. The first of these *Mistral* ships is scheduled to be delivered at the end of this year. On March 6, French President François Hollande addressed the possibility of suspending the arms sale, saying, “we honor contracts we have signed. We are not yet at the stage [of imposing such sanctions] and we hope to avoid getting there.”³⁰ Even before the annexation of Crimea, some Members of Congress and European leaders have repeatedly criticized France’s decision to sell the *Mistral* to Russia, expressing concern about Russia’s military intentions,³¹ while French commentators have noted the economic and associated political benefits of the sale for France.³² Since Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Germany has cancelled the planned sale of a military training facility to Russia; the UK and United States have also halted all military cooperation.³³

Prospects for NATO Enlargement

Russian actions in Ukraine have prompted some U.S. observers and Members of Congress to call for a more concerted NATO effort to enlarge the alliance, particularly to the east.³⁴ Among other things, they argue that continued enlargement would send an important signal to aspiring members that NATO’s “open door” policy will not be scaled back in the face of Russian opposition. Some proponents of enlargement add that Russia would be less willing and less able to take the aggressive actions it has in Ukraine, Georgia, and elsewhere in its near-abroad if these countries were members of the alliance. Despite these calls, most analysts consider NATO unlikely to make any significant progress toward expanding over the next several years. They point to a perception in some Western European countries that NATO has enlarged too quickly and that the alliance should agree on how to resolve a complex range of issues, including managing relations with Russia, before taking in new members. For some allied governments, ongoing territorial disputes with Russia in countries such as Georgia and Ukraine could be a strong deterrent to extending membership invitations to these countries.

³⁰ As quoted by Hugh Carney, “Spotlight on French Military Deal with Russia,” *Financial Times*, March 7, 2014.

³¹ They note, for example, that in August 2009, Admiral Vladimir Vysotskiy, the commander-in-chief of the Russian Navy, declared that the *Mistral* would have allowed “Russia’s Black Sea fleet to accomplish its mission in 40 minutes, not 26 hours, which is how long it took us” during the Georgia conflict.³¹ CEDR, September 13, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950041

³² When then-President Nicolas Sarkozy announced the sale in March 2011, he touted that the deal would bring “6 million hours of work and 1,200 jobs maintained over 4 years.” He added that he hoped to make the shipyard town of Saint-Nazaire, which has faced high unemployment levels, a symbol of French industrial achievement. Nicolas Sarkozy, as quoted in Open Source Center Analysis: *European Officials, Media Concerned about French Sale to Russia*, EUF2011031863900, March 18, 2011.

³³ Pierre Tran, “Europe Ramps Up Defense Posture Amid Russia Crisis,” *Defense News*, March 23, 2014.

³⁴ In February 2014, a bipartisan group of 40 Members of the House sent a letter to Secretary of State Kerry urging the Administration to support granting NATO membership to Montenegro and Macedonia and a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia at NATO’s September summit in Wales. The lawmakers also called for intensified progress on advancing Bosnia-Herzegovina’s MAP.

Four countries are currently considered formal aspirants for NATO membership: Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Georgia. Montenegro has had a Membership Action Plan (MAP) since December 2009. Although it is considered the candidate with the most advanced membership prospects, NATO officials have cautioned that Montenegrin security agencies and the defense sector need to meet NATO standards and that further efforts need to be made to fight corruption and organized crime in the country. Some have also questioned the level of public support for NATO membership in Montenegro. Bosnia was formally invited to join the MAP in April 2010, but was told that its Annual National Program under the MAP would not be accepted until the country resolved the issue of immovable defense property (mainly former military bases and barracks) on its territory. The country's leaders have agreed in principle to resolve the issue, but many doubt whether Bosnia can agree on whether to join NATO, as Bosnian Serb leaders have given mixed signals on the issue and public opinion polls have shown very strong opposition to membership among the Bosnian Serb population. NATO agreed that Macedonia met the qualifications for membership in 2008, but its candidacy has been stalled due to a protracted dispute with NATO ally Greece over the country's official name. The two sides have been unable to resolve the issue during talks sponsored by the United Nations.

Representatives of Ukraine's current government have said the country is not seeking NATO membership. This reflects long-standing indifference, if not opposition, to NATO membership in the country. Under former President Yanukovych, the country renounced previously asserted ambitions to join NATO. According to one March 2014 opinion poll, 34% of Ukrainians were for NATO membership, and 44% opposed, with a regional split of 74% for membership in western Ukraine and 67% opposed in the east.³⁵ Some observers assert that the Ukrainian government could be cautious about expressing ambitions to join NATO for a number of reasons, including sensitivity to public opinion and possible opposition to membership from countries within the alliance that would be reluctant to further antagonize Russia. In early April, in response to NATO Secretary General Rasmussen's assertion that the door to NATO membership for Ukraine remained open, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier reportedly countered that "NATO membership for Ukraine is not pending."³⁶

In September 2008, NATO and Georgia established the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) in an effort both to oversee NATO assistance to Georgia after its 2008 conflict with Russia and to supervise progress toward eventual membership in the alliance, as called for at NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit. Since then, the two sides have deepened cooperation in a variety of areas, especially on defense and security sector reform, and Georgia has contributed to ongoing NATO operations, including by deploying the second-largest non-NATO contingent in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, most observers believe that the unresolved situation in Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia could continue to pose a major obstacle to possible Georgian membership for the foreseeable future. They contend that as long as the territorial dispute persists, some allies could oppose defining a specific timeline for membership. Georgia has not been granted a Membership Action Plan.

Some observers have argued that recent Russian military aggression could indirectly serve to boost support for NATO membership in Sweden and Finland. Since joining NATO's Partnership

³⁵ The International Republican Institute, *Public Opinion Survey Residents of Ukraine*, March 14-26, 2014. <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20April%205%20IRI%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20of%20Ukraine%2C%20March%2014-26%2C%202014.pdf>

³⁶ "Ukraine Crisis Exposes Gaps between Berlin and NATO," *Spiegelonline*, April 7, 2014.

for Peace Program in 1994, both countries have been active participants in NATO operations and have taken significant steps to modernize their militaries. In a reflection of continuing sensitivities regarding relations with Russia, both have also continued to maintain long-standing policies of military “nonalignment.” In 2013, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said that Moscow would be forced to “respond” if Finland or Sweden joined NATO, and in the past year Russian forces have performed air and land exercises near Swedish and Finnish territory. Recent Russian actions and statements have led at least one Swedish government official to advocate a “doctrinal shift” in defense policy; and Finnish government representatives reportedly have said there should be an “open debate” about joining NATO.³⁷ Nonetheless, public opinion in both countries remains firmly opposed to NATO membership. Some analysts assert that at the least, the two governments could continue to bolster defense spending and cooperation with other Nordic states and the Baltics.

U.S. Policy

The crisis in Ukraine has renewed focus on the U.S. commitment to European security and on overall U.S. force posture in Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, as NATO and the EU have enlarged eastward and as both organizations have pursued partnership with Russia, the perceived need for a robust U.S. military presence to defend the continent receded. Today, about 67,000 U.S. forces are stationed in Europe, primarily in Germany, Italy, and the UK; this is down from a Cold War high of about 400,000. Some allies in Central and Eastern Europe have consistently expressed concerns about the reduced U.S. force posture, and especially the recent withdrawal of two of the Army’s four Brigade Combat Teams. Other allies and U.S. policy makers supported the shift, particularly given other security challenges facing the United States and NATO. The adjusted U.S. force posture has coincided with U.S. calls for European allies and the EU to develop enhanced military capabilities in order to boost NATO’s effectiveness and reduce Europe’s dependence on the U.S. security guarantee. As discussed above, such efforts have had mixed results, at best.

The Obama Administration and its supporters assert that the United States remains prepared and able to honor its commitments to the defense and security of fellow NATO member states. In addition to the aforementioned U.S. military responses to the crisis in Ukraine, they note that the United States was a key proponent of NATO’s drafting of contingency plans for the defense of Poland and the Baltic States in 2009, and they draw attention to recent U.S. calls for a new round of NATO contingency planning. They add that the U.S. agreement in 2011 to establish an Air Force Aviation detachment in Poland has paved the way for the recent deployment of 12 F-16s to the country, and point out that to compensate for the reduction of U.S. Brigade Combat Teams in Europe, the Department of Defense has committed a U.S.-based rapid reaction force to rotate to Europe for joint training exercises.³⁸

The current cornerstone of the U.S. commitment to NATO military capabilities in Europe is the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) program known as the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). The U.S. system, designed to defend alliance territory against possible missile attacks

³⁷ Alistair Scrutton and Sakari Suoninen, “As Russia growls, Swedes, Finns Eye Defence Options, NATO,” *Reuters*, April 1, 2014.

³⁸ See, for example, Samuel Charap and Lee Feinstein, “Obama’s Quiet Offensive,” ProjectSyndicate.org, April 3, 2014.

from Iran and other potential adversaries, serves as the foundation for a new NATO missile defense capability, based primarily on U.S. assets under NATO command and control. The United States has deployed missile defense ships to the Mediterranean, ready to operate under NATO control when necessary. A U.S. radar, based in Turkey, is also under NATO operational control. Interceptor sites are to be deployed in Romania in 2015 and in Poland in 2018. The United States and NATO have consistently emphasized, however, that the missile defense system is neither intended to nor capable of defending against a potential missile attack from Russia.

While they have welcomed these steps, critics of the Administration's and NATO's response to Russian actions in Ukraine have argued that more should be done to support Ukraine, reassure allies in Central and Eastern Europe, and counter Russian aggression. Some have called for bolstered and possibly permanent NATO and/or U.S. troop deployments in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as more frequent military exercises, including in the Black Sea. For example, as discussed above, the Polish government has requested the deployment of two heavy brigades of NATO troops on its territory. In a March 26, 2014, letter to President Obama, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon and seven other Members of Congress called on the President to "increase and enhance the alert posture and readiness of U.S. forces in Europe without delay, including maintaining forward-deployed U.S. quick-reaction forces."³⁹ At an April 10, 2014, hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on European Affairs, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Derek Chollet said that he did not foresee a significant adjustment to the U.S. military's permanent footprint in Europe, but added that forward or rotational deployments to Central and Eastern Europe were an ongoing possibility.⁴⁰

Critics of Administration policy draw attention to the fact that only 300 U.S. forces reportedly participated in NATO's November 2013 Steadfast Jazz exercise in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The 6,000-troop exercise—the largest NATO exercise to take place in the region in over 10 years—was intended to certify command and control elements of the NATO Response Force, including in response to a possible attack on the territory of a NATO member state. Other analysts have questioned the Administration's commitment to missile defense, noting that in 2013, the Administration dropped Phase 4 of the EPAA, which would have deployed in Europe land- and possible sea-based versions of advanced naval BMD interceptors designed to destroy limited numbers of first generation intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

As discussed above, the United States has provided the Ukrainian government with some nonlethal military aid, including 300,000 Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), but has thus far declined to provide lethal military aid. Some analysts, including a former NATO military commander, have argued that the United States and other allies should consider providing additional military assistance, including intelligence and surveillance capabilities and anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons.⁴¹

³⁹ House Armed Services Committee, "Armed Services Leaders Urge President to Act on Ukraine," March 26, 2014. http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/press-releases?ContentRecord_id=AE52EEAE-20D7-4C07-AE4B-1520D8287DD2.

⁴⁰ Hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on European Affairs, *Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe*, April 10, 2014. Transcript available at <http://www.cq.com/doc/congressionaltranscripts-4459211>.

⁴¹ See, for example, James Stavridis, "How to Fend off the Russians in Seven Simple Steps," *Foreignpolicy.com*, April 10, 2014.

Congress could continue to play an important role in shaping U.S. and NATO responses to Russia's actions in Ukraine. In terms of U.S. defense policy, possible congressional action could include reexamining U.S. force posture in Europe and assessing U.S. capacity and willingness to uphold its collective defense commitments in Europe. Congress could also take an increasingly active role in determining U.S. policy toward NATO and in guiding broader discussions about NATO's future, particularly ahead of the next NATO summit, scheduled to take place in Wales on September 4-5, 2014. This could include holding hearings and/or drafting legislation on issues such as development of allied military capabilities and military burdensharing within the alliance, the allied commitment to NATO enlargement and its relations with partner countries such as Ukraine and Georgia, NATO relations with Russia, and NATO involvement in areas such as cybersecurity and energy security.

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